

THE WEB OF FATE Or, A Revolutionary Scout By BYRON DOWLING

some of the old country regulars; but when we draw a bead upon the redcoats, you'll find the sharpshooters some.

"But has not Mr. Maxwell's lieutenant had a bad fall upon you?"

"Not a bit of it. The Redcoat, Miss 'Rora is worth a dozen of the old man, and she's with us."

"Do you know, though, that there is a British officer there, based on the same errand which brought me here, excepting that he wishes me to serve under the Hanoverian king, instead of the continental congress?"

"I know that. But that's the very best card, major, that could have been played. It throws the game right into your hands—high, low, Jack and Old Maxwell."

Rupert was somewhat astonished, and Mrs. Danforth took advantage of a pause in the conversation to press the adjutant to sit down to the table, which he appeared willing to do. When he had, in turn, done justice to the bountiful repast, the hostess produced some excellent cigars of home manufacture, which each of the young men accepted. Lighting the enticing weed, they went out on the piazza, where they paced to and fro, discussing military affairs in a cloud of smoke.

As the young officer learned the strength of his command, the former service which many of them had seen, and the alacrity with which they left their homes to enter the "continental line," proud thoughts again swelled his breast. This afternoon, meanwhile, had wasted away when the adjutant suddenly exclaimed:

"By the panthers, the sun is almost down! I must be off."

"And where, if I may ask?"

"To meet the greatest girl in all Georgia, major. Never fear, I'll be back by bedtime, and early in the morning will start for camp." Then taking his rifle, which he threw into the hollow of his left arm, keeping his right hand on the lock, the gallant young officer strode off, erect as one of the tall pines around him.

Unconsciously, and deeply plunged in moody thought, Rupert took another path, which he followed until the moon began to steal through the tall pines, casting a chequered light upon the verdant carpet. When he first set out, he thought of the time he was to command, ambition stirring his blood as the sound of a trumpet. But to one who loves a forest, a warm twilight soon leads every thought to the object of affection. Imagination fills the scene with additional beauty, peoples the stars with beings whose existence is love, and removes every obstacle that can be conjured up. At length, the path reached a roadway, and he was about to return, when the sound of voices and of a horse's hoofs met his ear.

Rupert was no coward, although it would not, just then, have been very pleasant for him to have fallen into the hands of any strange party of Tories. He consequently stopped behind a clump of thick bushes near by, where he remained perfectly quiet, determined to see who the comers might be.

The moon was now high in the heavens, and by the clear light Rupert soon saw two persons slowly approaching. One was on foot, now it was possible to mistake the pedestrian form for Adjutant Lydston was no common man. His companion, who rode a spirited bay horse, was a lady dressed in the homespun riding garb generally worn at that time. She was speaking as they approached his place of concealment, and no sooner did Rupert recognize her voice than he experienced such a conflict of feelings as he had never felt before.

Could it be? Was it indeed Aurora Maxwell? Had she, when he believed to be spotless as unsundered snow, come on horseback to meet a rude soldier? Was she, the modest beauty who had first attracted his love, the object of Lydston's idle boast? He felt sick at heart, and the more especially as he had been educated in Europe, where an unmarried lady never meets a gentleman, even her attendant never attended. A few moments before he would have given every object he possessed to have met her, to pour into her ears his new-born passions, with the enthusiastic eloquence of a French knight. Now, those desires were blighted as if by a sudden flash of lightning—may, he soon found that the foundation of his hopes was worse than sand. Approaching the spot where he stood breathless, they halted at the pathway, and Rupert was forced to hear their conversation.

"To which I can never consent," remarked Aurora, and her voice increased its magical influence over the listener.

"But why care a new for such a popinjay?" replied Lydston, who evidently had made some proposition not overacceptable. "I'm sure I've often heard you laugh at these idle chaps, and now to think you stand up for one."

Rupert stood as if paralyzed. Was Lydston rebuking her for the interest which she had manifested in him?

"Be patient, Mr. Adjutant," said she, "and rest assured that my opinions are not one whit changed. But remember, also, that the 'Stronghold' is my home; any stain upon its hospitality would remain as a stain upon my good name, and—"

"And upon your Scotch bridegroom when he comes to take possession of the 'Stronghold' and its mistress?"

"Never!"—and as Aurora spoke, Rupert felt a glacier-like chill steal over his frame. "Never! And by way of punishing you, Mr. Adjutant, for this saucy speech, I shall now leave you." Before either of her auditors, visible and invisible, could recover from their surprise, she had given her horse a smart stroke with her riding whip, and the noble animal had carried her far from them.

Lydston stood gazing after her for a moment, and exclaimed: "Plague take her Scotch lover! I wish I had him and Cornwallis yoked together, and could drive them into the basin of 'Tuccoo Falls.' Then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he took the pathway along which Rupert had come, and started for Danforth's house, whistling a camp air then very popular among the continentals. It had been composed in derision of them by a British officer; and at first every Tory had echoed the satirical verses, of which Danforth had given the inhabitants of the 'Stronghold' a sample that same morning. But since the continentals had adopted the air, and had sung it whenever their opponents were forced to lay down their arms in token of surrender, 'Yankee Doodle' found a ready echo in every American heart.

Rupert soon followed him, although when he approached the house, he turned into the woods, and came up as if he had been walking in another direction. Rather to his disgust, he found Lydston pacing the porch, enjoying a cigar.

"Why, my dear major," he exclaimed, "I feared that you had been seized by some stray party of Tories, and that we should have to fight for you ere you took command. Even Eustace, that most generous of young gentlemen, was unable to say when, how, or which way you went."

"There was something so frank in the young man's tones, that he could not refrain from cordially grasping the offered hand, and replying:

"I went out upon a stroll, and was so delighted with the moonlight, that I rather lost my way. These forests have a charm for me."

"I suppose so. Yet we only look at them as occupying ground able to grow good corn or tobacco. In your native land, though, I believe there are no such woods and mountains as these?"

"Nay," replied Rupert, the color mounting his cheeks as he drew himself up with a somewhat defiant air. "My native land is noted for her hills and her dales—her rocky crags and her forest-crowned lakes—none of them as you speak of."

"Well, you ought to know, major; but when at school, I was taught to regard France as a lovely country, with large vineyards and—"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Rupert, rather surprised. "I am not a native of France."

"Not a native of France?"

"Not! I was educated in France, but am a native of Scotland."

"You of Scotland?"

"Yes, and why?"

"Nothing, nothing. Only a particular friend of mine has a wonderful prejudice against the 'land of cakes,' as they call it; and only this very evening I was abusing one of his sons."

Rupert breathed easier, for it was evident that he could not have been the denounced captain.

"Are there many Scotchmen in this vicinity?" he inquired, in as careless a tone as possible.

"Not very many hereabouts, major. Over in the Carolinas there's a right smart chance of them, but 'Squire Maxwell is the only one around in this neighborhood." Then, after another puff at his cigar, he continued: "You'll find one in the sharpshooters—a young scamp of a trumpeter, who I rather suspect has deserted from the regulars. He is a good musician, but we find it hard to make him keep his horse steady; and when he has to attend to yours as well, I fear he will never be treated to a dose of two or three bullets."

"But it is getting late, so let us go to our nests. Mrs. Danforth has come to sleep long ago, for we are to have an early breakfast."

"There, if you are a Scotchman, major, can you recognize the plaid of this plaid?"

How Rupert regretted ever having studied his nation's apparel, for he had to plainly recognize the 'Macraich plaid'—may he had seen a box of the same material perched on the very same one of Aurora's dresses. But he thought best to affect a total indifference, although he envied Lydston, as he covertly kissed the plaid, to be before depositing it beneath his pillow.

Rupert retired to bed, but not to sleep, for there were several strange events of recent occurrence to occupy his thoughts. Many were his unavailing attempts to find some clue to the conduct of Aurora, but at length, somewhat, he felt asleep. Next it was admitted that his dreams were more fantastic than his waking thoughts.

"Home up, major!" was the hearty cry of Lydston at midnight. "We have a ride before us, and Mrs. Danforth has announced breakfast. Half an hour more, and the young men were galloping riding to the quarters of the sharpshooters.

CHAPTER VI. THE RENDEZVOUS OF FREE-BOY'S SONS.

The sharpshooters! When the future historian of the Revolutionary struggle shall attempt to analyze the origins of the various classes of citizens who took up arms in defence of their liberties, it will be a hard matter to decide whether Celtic, or Saxon, or Indian blood was predominant in the veins of these hardy backwoods-men. Scenery, like locality, goes some length in the formation of human character, and these hardy pioneers, reared among rugged hills, naturally acquired a wildness of moral temperament from the savage wilds around them. They regarded the refinements of civilization with contempt, but every man owned a good rifle, which he could use with deadly accuracy. The undivided nature of their territorial possessions, their implacable hostility to all laws, and their neighborhood to the revengeful Cherokee, were calculated to foster martial spirit. No alarm, however sudden or unexpected, could find them unprepared for prompt action. Indeed, their whole lives had been so much preparation for that free development of strength, action and endurance, so desirable for a corps destined to harass the regularly disciplined warriors of the crown.

The rendezvous of this Spartan band was in the heart of a forest, which was filled with underbrush to such an extent that it was impossible to march or retreat, save through a narrow trail. Even this led over a swamp in such a circuitous route that none but the initiated could find the stepping-stones. Those, however, who could enter the maze were somewhat astonished as Rupert Lydston was to find in the wood an open area. It had originally been used by the Cherokee as a cornfield, and was now covered with a grassy carpet, forming a new parade ground.

At the edge of the field which Rupert first approached, was the commissariat of the force which he was destined to command. A huge wood fire burned smolderingly in the bright daylight, and was surrounded by the negroes, who had followed their masters to camp, busily engaged in preparing the morning's dinner. One was turning a wooden spit, resting upon two forked sticks, driven into the ground before the fire, and sustaining two savory haunches of venison. Another rattle euphorium was baking corn-bread in thin cakes upon boards, kept at that exact distance from the hot coals, which made them crispy without burning them into carbon. Nor were two others less diligently employed in slicing potatoes into a large kettle, while a quantity of okra vines and onion skins around their feet afforded some proof that a regal "gumbo soup"—the Southern rival of chowder—was being prepared.

On the opposite side of the field was a row of tents, formed of saplings set up in the ground at such an angle that their tops met. They were interwoven with young birches, and then so covered with small bunches as to shed rain like a roof. In some of these men lay asleep on beds of hemlock boughs, or sat busily engaged in cleaning their rifles. But the larger portion of the force was concentrated around a huge stump at one side of the field, watching the exciting game of "faro," in which a few were deeply engaged.

They were, generally speaking, a spare and sinewy set, without an ounce of superfluous flesh, but with muscles like iron, and limbs as elastic as steel. No razor had polluted a few of the weather-bronzed countenances, yet there was not one man whose complexion was not legibly written. But while almost every form might have been cited as an example of the highest perfection of hardiness, the countenances were anything but uniform or elegant.

Their caps were of marlin-skins, with the tails of the animals hanging behind, and at the left side of each was a bucktail, worn as a plume. Blue linsey-woolsey hunting-shirts, of various shades as well as patterns, were belted around the waists of the wearers with wampum girdles, and some were gaily decked with fringe, or with Indian embroidery. Deer-horn leggings and moccasins were worn by all, while from nearly every belt shrouded in a green cord crossed the body, sustaining a powder horn, so thinly veiled down as to betray the amount of its contents. Many had charged nearly carved out of the root of some wild animal, at which to their powder horns others wore the rock Indian pouches, daily by embroidered in bead-work. One of them carried a glittering tomahawk in his belt—a trophy taken from a Creek Indian, whom he had killed in a desperate encounter.

"Boy!" shouted Adjutant Lydston, as they approached the camp-grounds. "Attention! Here's Major Lydston, our commander!"

In an instant every occupation was suspended, and the new leader was surrounded by his entire force—officers, privates and musicians, each anxious to have a glance at him. Foremost in the throng was an old hunter who acted as orderly sergeant to one of the companies, and now gazed at the major with deliberate curiosity, his comrades seemed waiting his verdict. At last his survey was apparently finished. Advancing, he proffered a drinking-cup, saying:

"We're right glad to see you, major, for we begun to be afraid you'd gin out like some of these milk-and-water whigs. You'll find us a rough set, quick on trigger, but true as steel. Will you take a drink?"

Ere the meal was finished it was dark, and when Rupert left the camp-lodger which was lighted by torches of resinous wood, he found himself in a scene of singular beauty. The leafy bowers were lighted up, and the groups seated around the watch-fires were suffused with one ruddy glow, forming a nocturnal pageant. At one fire, Sergeant Fournay was recounting his bear-fights with complacent self-satisfaction. Cards were evidently a favorite amusement, while others, in excellent humor, were engaged in athletic sports. At length, the murmur grew fainter, the pres-

grew dim, and the different parties retired to their shelters. Adjutant Lydston and Quartermaster Danforth shared the bower of the major, who could not inwardly sigh as he witnessed the excellent spirits of his supposed rival.

What playthings of fortune we all are! How often do the events of a moment change the whole current of a human existence, rendering tenants of a heart feelings and emotions previously strangers, and expelling those heretofore most deeply rooted. The form of Aurora Maxwell was ever before Rupert, and he felt that she was associated with his very being. Yet she was evidently another's—another had evidently won her affections. The thought was maddening, and, rising, he went out into the open air.

It was very dark, for heavy clouds veiled the heavens, and soon the storm began. Rupert was at that moment near the arbor used as a guard-tent. Into which he stepped, greatly to the satisfaction of Sergeant Fournay. The scene was sublime. Vivid flashes of lightning often revealed the dark scenery around, making the watch-fires look pale. Then would follow loud peals of thunder, echoing and re-echoing through the distant mountains, as if their lofty peaks trembled in terror.

All at once, there was a portentous crash, and a wild cry of agony, as if the spirits of earth were responding to the spirits of heaven. Then, riding over the fury of the storm, was heard the voice of Danforth:

"Turn out! Turn out! The major's carried off, dead or alive, and the adjutant has been stabbed!"

This startling announcement of Danforth brought the entire force to the headquarters, regardless of the storm. Just then the clouds dispersed, and suddenly the night put on a smile of so ineffable a beauty, that no words could adequately describe that sweet and calm effulgence. The appearance of Rupert, dissipated a portion of the consternation caused by the alarm, but the adjutant had been wounded by some would-be assassin. Luckily, he had sustained no serious injury, but could give no idea as to the person or motives of his assailant. The sharp steel had awakened him from a sound slumber, and all that he remembered was that he saw a dark form glide from the bower.

Medical diplomas were rare in the back-country in those days, but every "sharpshooter" was skilled in the use of such remedies as the laboratory of nature afforded. Old Sergeant Jones (whose flask Rupert had emptied) examined the wound, and a loud cheer followed his decision, that "Flesh soon heals—no cord's touched—now for some mullen leaves, some on you, and to-morrow it'll begin to heal!"

The excitement, however, did not abate, for no crime is held in greater abhorrence by sturdy sons of the forest than assassination—so cowardly and so malicious. Neither was it difficult to read in the compressed glances of the different individuals, a stern desire to have the perpetrator punished. But who could it be? The adjutant was so universally respected, that no one could for an instant entertain the idea that one of the sharpshooters had committed the crime. Neither was it believable that any one could have passed the guards, penetrated into the very heart of the encampment, and then have escaped untraced. Indeed the lovers of the marvelous asserted that no living sort of a supernatural agency could have inflamed the wound.

"Look a here!" at last exclaimed one of a group near the wounded man. "I'll have a pint of whiskey it's an Indian that's done it. Emathia was over at the falls yesterday, and perhaps the old chap had a grudge against the adjutant."

"Sure enough," said another. "I knowed no white man could have got in here. 'Twas a red-skin."

"Hear him up!" "Pay him off!" "Well! And him!" with similar exclamations resounded on all sides, but Sergeant Jones silenced them with an authoritative wave of his hand.

"Hold your fire, boys," he growled out. "I know the redskins better now you do—you all know I do—and I tell you none of 'em made this wound. They'll jump at a man in the woods, as a 'coon lights on a young chicken, but they never come in a place like this."

"But who did it?"

A shade came over the old man's brow, as he glanced around, but it passed away as his eyes fell upon some one whom he perhaps suspected, as a spring cloud vanishes before the morning sun.

"I can tell ye all one thing," said he. "A shot!" exclaimed at least a dozen voices.

"I didn't do it. Now move away, and let the fresh air blow, for I am afraid the adjutant will have a fever. 'Tis all the danger."

A merry peal of laughter greeted this non-committal declaration, but it was suddenly checked, and as the group separated many a threat was heard. It would have been far better with the assassin had he been known, and in the hands of that hardy band.

Rupert Lydston was probably more perplexed than any one present, and remained sitting by Lydston's side, listening attentively to every supposition as to the supposed culprit. All at once the thought flashed over his mind that perhaps the deadly blow was intended for himself! Horrible idea! It was heart-sickening to think that at the very outset of his career he had been the prey of the assassin, and for what? Rapidly did his thoughts journey in quest of some object upon which he could ground a suspicion, but his guiltless conscience searched in vain. He was a foreigner, a stran-

ger, but his cordial reception assured him that there could be no jealousy on that score. At last, incapable of finding a clue, or conjecturing an explanation, or of forming an opinion, he sat motionless with an air of puzzled bewilderment.

Danforth, on the contrary, was nervously excited in his eagerness to discover the perpetrator of the crime. Moving rapidly from group to group, he mingled in the conversation, his eyes flashing with rage, in the hope of ascertaining something upon which to base suspicion. At last he stopped before a small hut next that where the crime had been committed. It was occupied by the musicians of the battalion, two of whom sat before it, discussing the all-engrossing topic.

One of them, whose position was shown by the bugle strapped to his back, merits a passing word of description, although his personal appearance was anything but prepossessing. He was short and strongly built, with red hair, a freckled face, small gray eyes, and a countenance bearing the stamp of a low malicious disposition. "Never was the face a truer index to the heart, than was the countenance of Sandy McGregor, an exponent of his vagrant recklessness, insolence and cunning. A deserter from the British, he had been enlisted by Danforth solely on account of his musical abilities, but it required many a stirring tune from his bugle to atone for his frequent quarrels, his neglect of duty, and his apparent delight in mischief making.

"Well, Sandy," asked Mr. Quartermaster, "what think you of this knifing business?"

"I'm no thinking much, Mr. Quartermaster," was the reply, "but I have just wondered where this new major did keep himself."

"And I'm thinking, you rascal, that a touch of stirrup-leather will do you good," angrily responded Danforth.

Warm blood gleamed in the young bugler's face, but he replied in a humble tone: "Now, quartermaster, I meaned no harm. Our new major's a brother Scotchman, and I would no for the world say nought uncanny of him."

"You had better not," tartly answered Danforth. "And now, as it is near daylight, sound the reveille for your troop. You will not parade with it, though, for you might fall into the hands of those who know how to punish deserters."

Returning to the wounded man, Danforth found him in a refreshing sleep, while Rupert sat absorbed in thought, and started when he was addressed.

"Major," said Danforth, "I must take away about two-thirds of the sharpshooters for three or four days. You think this strange, perhaps, but I must go to Augusta for arms."

"What," interrupted Rupert, "from the British arsenal?"

"Exactly."

"But how?"

"That must be left to me, for various reasons, none of them compromising yourself or the continental cause. Indeed, you have not as yet taken command, and so I must request you to defer the ceremony for a few days, while I equip the force."

"Well," replied Rupert with a smile, "I am but a novice in these matters, and you are really in command now. So do as you think best."

"Good," exclaimed Danforth. "We will leave a guard under Sergeant Jones, and should by any chance a stronger party of Tories pass this way, he will either help you to whip them, or pilot you to a hiding place near the falls."

An hour afterwards, Danforth left at the head of his posse of men, all unarmed, and apparently undisciplined. Alone with the wounded adjutant, Rupert's ardent spirit sought occupation in the fairy land of imagination, and many were his day-dreams of love, with Aurora as the bright star. His soul turned toward the "Stronghold," as the source from whence his future happiness must come, and in the afternoon, guided by a fascinating infatuation, he mounted his horse. Exercise was his excuse to the adjutant, but he took with him one of the men as a guide and veiled the path over which he had come from the scene of his enchantment.

CHAPTER VII. LOVE AND PATRIOTISM.

Captain Trevor was also charmed with the fair heiress of the "Stronghold," and when Danforth had left, he thought he could not better occupy his time than in laying siege to her affections. Joining her in the library, he entered into conversation upon general topics, and certainly she had never heard a gentleman speak with more delicacy, originality or vivacity. Ransacking his pleasant memories, he narrated in glowing language the splendors of the British metropolis, the extent of its parks, the magnitude of its commerce, and the vast treasures of literature and of art in its collections.

Aurora listened with evident interest, and Capt. Trevor soon felt his heart throbbing with a warmth that fast kindled into a fervent admiration. Unluckily, he touched upon a topic that was not agreeable:

"Then there is the court, O Miss Maxwell, you should see our sovereign surrounded by the beauty and rank of his kingdom."

"Excuse me, captain. Your sovereign, not yours," coolly remarked Aurora, while a smile of disdain curled her beautiful lips.

"Ah! I forgot your rebellious tendencies, miss. And to whom, pray, do you look for a king?"

"To the people," said she.

"The people? A full Hue of all kinds of leg o' blanke."

Bon-Bons and Confections

AT

The Batesburg Drug Co.

CANDIDS manufactured and packed by young ladies all in white dresses. Not a speck of dust or dirt is ever allowed to accumulate and therefore our confections are of the cleanest and purest that can be bought. If you buy a box you will surely buy more. The choice and "rich-iest."

BATESBURG DRUG COMPANY

Postmaster Kad J. Price, of Rock Hill, died last Saturday.

Mr Sam T. Folsom, a prominent citizen of Kershaw, was killed by a train at that place last Friday.

Orangeburg had a \$30,000 fire last week.

Atlanta, Ga., is attending the Columbia (S. C.) Female Sem.

Try It Yourself!

Columbia boasts an old-fashioned barber shop, everything being run on the sterilized plan. The hair is shaved, the razors are sterilized, everything used is sterilized. Cold towels are used and all that can possibly be done to make the shave a pleasant one is here provided for. No one ever dreads, but looks forward to with pleasant anticipation, the coming of the shaving time. It is patronized by the Jerome Hotel Barber Shop in Columbia. Have you tried their electric shaver? It is the finest in the land, and it sterilizes this shop once you are a regular customer.

Attention! Gardeners.

UNITED STATES SENATE, Washington, D. C., Jan. 15, 1904.

Editor BATESBURG ADVOCATE:

Dear Sir: I am sending you a number of packages of garden seed, which I would be glad to have you distribute as equally as you can among the people of your community who will most appreciate them.

Having only a limited number of packages, and it being impossible to send to everyone in the State, I have thought it best to adopt this method,

in the hope that the seed will reach the largest number of people, and do the most good.

If anyone who has not received seed will write me, I will try to supply them.

With best wishes,

Yours very truly,

A. C. Latimer

Dr. James Scherer has resigned as pastor of St. Andrews Lutheran church at Charleston, to take the presidency of Newberry College.